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ABSTRACT

The partnership between public television and higher education is addressed by the president of Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Both higher education and public television seek to expand and enhance adult learning, and both are threatened financially in the pursuit of this mission. The student body of colleges and universities is getting older: one-third of all students enrolled in credit courses are over 25 years old. It is claimed that college enrollments will increase if postsecondary institutions can develop programs and implement delivery systems to attract and serve adult students. Although 72 percent of all postsecondary students over 25 years old are part-time students, many adults are involved in career training and development studies outside of colleges and universities. Thirty percent of all adult learning, credit and noncredit, is associated with postsecondary institutions. Television can help colleges to find solutions to some of the problems of serving adult learners, on and off campus. Television can provide credit courses, informal learning opportunities, and professional and career training. In 1981, the first year of PBS's Adult Learning Service, 220 public television stations worked cooperatively with over 500 colleges to deliver television courses that will be taken by about 50,000 students for credit. It is suggested that higher education and public television have the technology and experience to provide high quality programs and can set the standards and evaluate the offerings. Both share the mission and dedication to high standards in providing exposure to the arts, culture, and education. (SW)

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COMING TOGETHER --

PUBLIC TELEVISION AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Remarks by

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President
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Before the

National Telecourse Conference 1982:
Managing Technology for Adult Learners

Dallas, Texas

April 30, 1982

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Dee Brock
Public Broadcasting Service

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

I am grateful to you for inviting me to be your keynote speaker for this National Telecourse Conference. It is a tribute really to Bill Reed and Dee Brock who, in the course of one experimental year, have placed PBS squarely in the national leadership of the adult learning movement. We look upon PBS's adult learning effort as one of our proudest accomplishments this year, and certainly as one of our highest priorities and greatest opportunities for the future. We have become zealots in the great cause of adult learning through television and we intend to explore every avenue and use every possible resource to further that cause.

I would like to talk to you this morning about the partnership between higher education and public television. We share a great deal in common -- a common mission and purpose, a common danger to our survival, and a common future and promise. I would also like to share with you my perspective about the so-called telecommunications revolution, offering some words of caution and skepticism about its promise vs. its performance. And finally I would like to suggest some directions for a closer and inevitable alliance, indeed a fusing of public television and higher education.

Those of us in public television and those of you in higher education share a common mission -- to know ourselves and all that is around us. To enlighten, to inform and to educate. We share a conviction about the direction for our future -- to expand, improve and enhance adult learning. And we share a present day dire financial threat to our ability to satisfy our

civilizing purpose and mission. Together we can overcome those temporary financial cutbacks -- to public education and to public broadcasting.

The fact is that your greatest opportunities lie with our growing audiences. There is a revolution going on in post-secondary education today. One part of that change is taking place on campuses. The graying of higher education may be an overstatement but the student body is certainly getting older. One-third of all students enrolled in credit bearing courses in colleges and universities are now over 25 years old. The number of students 35 years and older has increased 37% in the last five years.

And it is this older student who has saved higher education from the declining enrollments and closing doors that the educational statisticians have been warning about for years. As the last of the baby boom generation was graduated from high school, there would certainly have been a drastic drop in enrollments without the new adult audience. However, rather than the declining numbers predicted by many, the enrollments last fall showed a modest increase. And the adult learners who account for these increased numbers will continue to swell college enrollments if post-secondary institutions can develop programs and implement delivery systems to attract and serve adult students. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that if the current trends continue there will be as many students over 25 as there

are under 25 by the end of this decade. By the year 2000 over one-half of the population of the nation will be over 50 years old.

Still another trend is the increasing number of part-time students on campus. While full-time enrollment is declining across the board, part-time enrollment is going up. Part-timers increased by over 3% last year. A full 72% of all post-secondary students over 25 years of age are now part-time students.

The second part of that revolution is going on off campus. In Americans in Transition, a recent College Board publication, the authors identified over 60 million adults, age 25 and over, as learners in 1980. More than 30 million of those learners were involved in career training and development studies but only 30% of them were learning through colleges and universities. Thus, even though adults are flocking to colleges and universities to attain degrees and to take courses (most of which have some job or career goal at the end), a far greater number of them are learning elsewhere.

Peter Drucker, in a much quoted speech delivered last year, predicted that continuing education, which is adult learning that is aimed at professional development or career training, would soon be a third tier in higher education. Actually, Drucker was behind the times. In 1980 continuing education had ascended to the first tier of higher education. In 1980 about $65 billion was spent on all higher education in the United

States, while more than half that amount, between $35 and $40 billion, was spent on continuing education, according to the American Society for Training and Development.

How and by whom was this money spent? The American Association of Higher Education reports some 40,000 business seminars in 1980. The American Management Association alone enrolled 100,000 students in 32,000 seminars in 1980. The American Telephone and Telegraph Company spent $700 million on employe training; and the federal government spent $238 million on personnel training, not counting the military services. These are just some of the events that have led the National Center for Educational Statistics to predict that $2.2 billion will be spent on management training alone in 1982.

Yet the fact remains that colleges and universities have not yet taken the major role in this learning revolution, for only 30% of all adult learning -- credit and noncredit -- is associated with post-secondary institutions. The other learning activities are associated with on-the-job training, professional and trade associations, proprietary groups and study undertaken by students on their own. One possible consequence, according to a forecast by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, is that by the year 1990 the number of college and university faculty will be down by 10% even while the number of adult students will be up by 18%.

There is a great opportunity here -- for you and for us. The revolution in television holds great promise for helping colleges and universities to find solutions to some of the problems of serving adult learners, full and part time, on and off campus, in ways that meet their needs and fit their schedules. As I've said, your new students are our new audiences. The present public television audience mirrors the U.S. population in terms of education, socioeconomic status, occupation and race. And it is a rapidly, dramatically growing audience. Today, more than 90 million people are watching public television each and every week -- over half the nation's television homes. While the commercial network shares have declined by 15% in the past five years, public television's audience has increased by 70%; 85% during prime time alone. So much for the contention that public television is viewed only by a small elite segment of the population. We are serving and want to serve the same people as you do.

Only 18 months ago PBS staff began to work to organize an alliance in higher education with Coast Community College, Dallas Community College, Miami-Dade Community Colleges and the Southern California Community College consortium, among others, and with public television stations -- to develop a partnership between higher education and public television for the delivery of adult learning services. The plan calls for adult learning in its broadest sense: college credit courses, informal learning, professional and career training. The

partnership is a natural and a thriving one, for public television has always been involved in education. It just took the national impetus to bring it to a new level of awareness and activity.

This past year, the first year of PBS's Adult Learning Service, 220 public television stations have worked in partnership with over 500 colleges and universities to deliver television courses that will be taken by some 50,000 students for credit by June. That's some accomplishment for the first academic year! Even more remarkable is the fact that, according to a special study just completed by the Nielsen Company and PBS Research, 650,000 people each week viewed the telecourses distributed by PBS. Clearly, we have a good start in achieving our mutual goals of serving new students and new audiences through public television.

Indeed, we have been so encouraged by the response that adult learning at PBS is being enhanced and continued on a self-supporting basis. Looking to the future, public television is exploring new ways to deliver educational services, including our proposed National Narrowcast Service, PBS/Cable and initiatives in computer assisted instruction. Which brings me to the impact of new technologies on our efforts. We've heard much of the promise and excitement of new telecommunications opportunities. I would suggest, however, that current enthusiasms are leading to immoderate and unrealistic expectations. We've seen it all

before. Half a century ago radio was introduced as the "magic music box" that would bring Mozart to millions and spread unprecedented enlightenment from city to hamlet. After World War II television arrived with the promise of being "the saving radiance in the sky" that would deliver Shakespeare to Sheboygan and turn every living room into an opera house, theater, concert hall, museum, library, classrocm and political soap box.

Today the dramatic transformation of television by satellite, cable, cassette and disc is bringing forth once again a barrage of blue sky forecasts about educational, cultural and informational wonders to come. On Wall Street the new media are the big money favorites. In Washington, telecommunications policy makers assure us that we are about to enter an era of abundance in which hundreds of television channels will entertain, inform, educate and uplift us in ways never before dreamed possible, all in the safety and comfort of our own home.

My own expectations from the new television abundance are considerably more modest. My crystal tube is clouded over by the lessons learned from similar recent media transformations of radio, magazines, books and newspapers. Present day economic and structural changes in those industries suggest that technological abundance by itself, far from making things better, too often changes them for the worse.

I happen to believe that the main impact of the new media technologies on public television will be to make public television even more important in the future than it has been in the past. That is the good news. The bad news is that public television will be so important in the future because the new television technologies are more likely to dilute the quality and character of education, the arts and information than improve them. Public service television will still be needed as the countervailing civilizing force on our most pervasive and influential medium of communications.

My own forecast is that the proliferation of channels will spawn a gigantic supermarket of commercial programming that is slickly designed, carefully packaged, plentifully displayed, heavily merchandised, and overwhelmingly bland and easy-to-digest. The evidence so far demonstrates that the actual product of the new media expansion does not measure up to its exuberant promise.

Take radio. During the past 25 years radio stations, especially on the FM band, have multiplied dramatically in virtually every community. Yet commercial radio's programming diversity and quality have markedly declined not improved. Today, scores of radio stations, broadcasting a variety of program formats, can be heard in almost every home in the United States. But apart from public radio there is no radio drama, no radio educational programming, hardly any original

performing arts on radio, hardly any major documentaries, few quality programs for minorities, fewer for the elderly, none for children. A technology of abundance, far from enriching and expanding radio's programming choice, has managed to shrink it drastically. Will the technological explosion have the opposite effect on television? I very much doubt it, unless you in education and we in public television do something about it.

That doubt is reinforced by a similar trend in publishing. Take magazines. In a business once dominated by Life, Look and the Saturday Evening Post (the print antecedents of ABC, CBS and NBC), the proliferation of special interest magazines was greeted as evidence of an educational and cultural publishing explosion. However, one look at the kinds of titles that fill today's magazine racks suggests the kinds of programs that will be filling the new multiple highways of television. They tend to be narrow tributaries off the mainstream: movies, gossip, sports, pop entertainment, news, money, sex and other leisure-time pursuits.

What of the hoped for profusion of political, artistic, educational, philosophical, cultural, literary and quality magazines for the general public? In today's high-powered marketing environment these are either dead, dying or desperately trying to stay alive by, of all things, converting to tax exempt not-for-profit corporations.

The same trend is, if anything, even more pronounced in book publishing whose paperback revolution began at least 50 years ago. The venerable privately owned publishing houses have largely faded away. As Thomas Whiteside demonstrated in his book, The Blockbuster Complex, publishers now focus almost entirely on the blockbuster best-seller at the expense of "less profitable but artistically more meritorious works." In commercial publishing fewer but bigger is the catchword. For books, as for radio and magazines, more has come to mean less. The university presses and educational publishing have become more necessary than ever to preserve our highest values.

A similar evolution is taking place in the newspaper business Many of the biggest circulation dailies, once thought to be invulnerable, are now in deep financial trouble. The Washington Star and the Philadelphia Bulletin have already folded. The New York Daily News and Chicago Tribune are seriously ailing.

This same pattern of fragmentation and dilution which has recently characterized other media has already begun to make its mark on American commercial television. The rise of UHF channels and cable's distribution of distant signals have brought about more programming specialization, with individual stations concentrating on news, sports, movies and packaged entertainment series. But that very specialization, caused by the increase in number of channels, has also caused a severe decline in the actual diversity and quality of commercial

television programming. In the future, when every community will have dozens or even hundreds of channels, television audiences will be so fragmented that commercial broadcasters will no longer be able to afford any major drama, quality children's programs, original performing arts, significant public affairs documentaries, or serious educational programming. Television will become like radio.

We see that same trend happening already even with the new cable program services. The cable services first sprouted with ambitious promises to provide culture, news, sports, children's programs, women's programs, minority programs. But economic reality has set in early. As Newsweek recently reported, ". . . cable television's nascent cultural revolution is confronting an economic crisis that threatens to strangle it at birth." Despite the great promise of programming diversification, virtually the entire financial underpinning of cable, subscription TV and the video cassette business rests on movies, boxing matches and pornography. The new electronic highways, even more than the old, are bringing us prize fights before prize drama and centerfolds before serious music.

All of which brings me to my final point -- the direction of our alliance. We must seize the opportunity to use technologies to expand the best that civilization has to offer. If public television and higher education do not do it together, nobody will. The synthesis of television, satellite, computer and

cable does offer extraordinary opportunities for education. It brings unprecedented resources to every campus, reaching throughout the nation and throughout the world to make available the greatest teachers, reference material, data and unlimited information with the push of a button. It extends the opportunities heretofore restricted to the campus to students at home and at work. It offers two way communication -- feedback to and from specific audiences. It permits new and dramatic techniques for bringing information and understanding. It offers new opportunities to serve a population equipped with a new kind of literacy and experience -- television literacy and computer literacy. Video games, remember, are one of the fastest growing phenomena at home, on campus and in amusement arcades.

All this serves to outline the nature of our growing alliance. We in public television have the highways, the satellite links, the audiences, the capacity to reach out, the experience in production and use of the new forms. You in higher education set the standards, determine the content, provide the accreditation, offer the evaluation. Both of us share the mission, the dedication to higher values.

Since the beginning of civilization, the arts, culture and education have been kept alive by the patronage of the church, the crown or the state. We mark the quality of every society by its legacy of support for those civilizing institutions. Together, we must fight to keep that support in order to make

our society worth living in. Today that legacy must be sustained by a partnership of the educational institutions and the arts institutions, connected to the people by public television. This is a powerful alliance that can exist to make available to all the very best our civilization has to offer. Such a goal is within our reach for the very first time. It is tempting to hope that this responsibility will be embraced automatically by the new technologies in the marketplace. But the evidence so far offers little encouragement. Whatever diversification the new technologies will finally bring is diversification for profit, an estimable but limiting goal which determines what is done only by what will sell.

I do believe that great new opportunities will emerge from the new technologies. But I have no illusions. Efforts to disseminate the arts, education and information to all will be even more of a struggle in the future than in the past. As these avenues of communication expand exponentially, we have the responsibility to see to it that the babel of commercial voices filling its hundreds of channels will not drown out the values we cherish most. Which is why the nation shall have to depend to an even greater extent on you and on us to play a vital civilizing role. That, in the end, is what your conference is really all about.

Thank you.